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ABSTRACT

One component of the Emergency School Aid Act (ESAA) is the Nonprofit Organization Program (NPO), under which local groups funded for this purpose carry out a program designed to support the development or implementation of a public school desegregation plan. The purpose of this study is to assess the effectiveness of NPO groups compared with non-ESAA community organizations. It concludes that NPOs are less effective than non-ESAA community organizations, and that this is the result of procedures instituted in 1971 by the U.S. Office of Education, which require school district review of NPO proposals. Most community groups believe that they cannot engage in advocacy activity or citizen action and retain school district approval, and they generally resolve this problem either by submitting NPO applications for non-controversial educational service activities, or by not applying for NPO funds. Non-ESAA groups tend to emphasize advocacy and desegregation-specific activities, which are generally more effective than the educational service activities emphasized by NPOs. It is also reported that communities receiving ESAA NPO awards have a low need for desegregation aid. Recommendations are that: (1) funding be targeted on recently desegregated communities: (2) advocacy activities closely linked to school desegregation be promoted rather than education service activities; and (3) NPOs be made less subject to school district approval and influence. (Author/RLV)

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EVALUATION STUDY
Executive Summary

AN EVALUATION OF THE EMERGENCY SCHOOL AID ACT NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS PROGRAM

June, 1979

U.S. Department of
Health, Education, and Welfare
Office of Education
Office of Planning, Budgeting
and Evaluation

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
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One component of the Emergency School Aid Act (ESAA) is the Nonprofit Organization Program (NPO). Local groups funded under this program -- called NPOs--carry out programs "designed to support the development or implementation" of a public school desegregation plan. Any public and private nonprofit group (except a local school district) is eligible to apply for funding.

PURPOSE

The purpose of the study is to assess the effectiveness of NPO groups compared with other non-ESAA community organizations, determine what makes a community organization (both NPOs and non-ESAA groups) effective, and examine impact of federal regulations upon the program. The non-ESAA groups are organizations in the same communities which receive no financial support from ESAA or, in many cases, from other federal aid programs.

METHODOLOGY

Some 1,000 interviews plus record data were collected in Spring 1977 on 131 community organizations--59 NPOs and 72 non-ESAA groups--located in 40 school districts throughout the country. NPO application data were analyzed as well as questionnaire results from NPO projects nationwide. Finally, interviews were conducted with 50 people associated with the development and/or implementation of ESAA. The study is based on 215 awards for a total of $17.2 million made in Fiscal Year 1976 for NPO projects to be conducted in 1976-1977.

Project effectiveness was measured by constructing an effectiveness score which is an objective rating of the amount of change a group brought about in its own community. This effectiveness score is consistent with the statute. The effectiveness score was calculated for each of the 131 organizations where interviews were conducted. The highest effectiveness scores were achieved by groups whose activities produced changes that: (1) affected many people (such as actual changes in a desegregation plan), (2) were fully implemented, and (3) directly facilitated desegregation .

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

The study, carried out by the Rand Corporation, concludes that NPOs are less effective than non-ESAA community organizations, and that the major cause of this problem is actions taken by the U.S. Office of Education (USOE) in 1971.

Targeting:

- Communities receiving ESAA NPO awards have a low need for desegregation aid. Seven of every ten school districts in which NPO awards are made are not actively desegregating (most completed implementing their desegregation plan five or more years ago).

Activities:

- The 131 community organizations working in the areas of school desegregation or minority group isolation conduct three types of activities:

  (1) Educational service activities

  Examples include tutoring and other compensatory education activities, cultural enrichment, and career guidance.

  (2) Advocacy activities

  Examples include disseminating information, increasing community influence in school decision-making, and influencing site selection or school closings.

  (3) Desegregation-specific activities

  Examples include filing suit against the district, attempts to influence the content or timing of the desegregation plan, and attempts to influence white flight.

- NPOs typically emphasize educational service activities. Eighty-six percent of NPOs provided educational services compared with only 25 percent of the non-ESAA groups. The typical NPO project involves tutoring some minority group children.

- Non-ESAA community groups emphasize advocacy and desegregation-specific activities. Sixty-eight percent of the non-ESAA groups conduct advocacy activities and 45 percent conduct desegregation-specific activities, compared with 31 percent and 3 percent respectively for NPOs. The typical non-ESAA group focuses these activities upon a few decision-makers or a large group (such as community-wide for information dissemination).

Effectiveness:

- o Non-ESAA organizations on the whole have a much greater impact in their communities than NPOs. Thirty-eight percent of the non-ESAA groups were rated as highly effective vs. only 7 percent of the NPOs.

- o Most NPOs (78%) have moderate effectiveness scores. This reflects their emphasis on low risk-low payoff educational service activities which USOE has encouraged.

What makes a community organization effective?

A statistical analysis found two crucial differences between effective and ineffective community organizations.

- o Activity selection

  The most effective organizations conduct advocacy activities. Those groups have more impact because they choose activities which if successful, could bring about institutional change affecting many people. Even those groups that disseminate information do it as a first step in building support for a desegregation plan. Educational service activities are less effective because they involve relatively few students and seem to have small or temporary effects. Desegregation-specific activities usually show either very great effects or virtually no effect and tend to be long-term undertakings.

- o Citizen action strategy

  Organizations with the greatest impact in promoting desegregation choose citizen action strategies. Examples include private discussions with school district officials as well as speaking out publicly at school board meetings and forming coalitions with other groups in pursuit of common goals. Perhaps most typical are the 10 local Leagues of Women Voters visited, many of which are effective. When they disagreed with district policies, their tactic was to gather relevant facts, publicly testify before the school board, write letters to board members and the media, and finally to lobby privately.

Federal barriers to NPO success

The study concludes that a major barrier to NPO success were the procedures instituted in 1971* by USOE which promoted school district dominance over NPOs. These procedural changes have inhibited NPOs from using their most effective methods: advocacy activities and a citizen action strategy.

The major way USOE has promoted school district dominance over NPOs is by requiring applicant NPOs to provide the school district with 15 days to review the NPO proposal, offer recommendations, and submit comments to USOE. The vast majority of the 1976-77 letters in effect consisted of an LEA evaluation of the NPO proposal. Also, NPO proposals are reviewed by four-member review panels, with three panelists representing the educational system and only one panelist a community representative.

As a result of these procedures, most community groups believe they cannot engage in advocacy activities or adopt a citizen action strategy and retain the continued school district goodwill and approval they perceive as required for continued NPO funding. Community groups generally resolve this problem either by submitting NPO applications for non-controversial educational service activities or by not applying for NPO funds. This study finds the latter groups to be more effective.

The study concludes that the major reasons for the 1971 USOE policy change limiting the autonomy of NPOs are: the Nixon Administration's limited support for school desegregation, conflict within the Congress over goals of the program, protests by Southern school districts that NPOs were too independent and adversarial, and the fact that USOE is more attuned to the concerns of its consitituent school districts than the concerns of desegregation advocates.

Other reasons why NPOs have lower impact

- Candidate NPOs submit proposals which are reviewed and total scores used to rank proposals to determine which get funded. The total scores are uncorrelated with effectiveness. Put another way, the proposal review system does not succeed in identifying effective NPOs.

- Most NPOs do not select their activities to meet the desegregation needs of their communities. In constrast, in districts with newer desegregation plans, non-ESAA groups

*The NPO program existed as the "Community Groups" program of the predecessor of ESAA, the Emergency School Assistance Program from 1970-73.

tend to select advocacy activities which seem to be more appropriate and are generally effective. In a number of districts which are newly desegregating or about to desegregate, the NPOs are conducting tutorial activities while the non-ESAA groups are working on rumor control, forming umbrella organizations to lobby for changes in the plan, or conducting human relations training for parents and students.

Remedies

The study provides several recommendations including targeting of funding on recently desegregating communities, promoting advocacy activities closely linked to school desegregation rather than education service activities, and making NPOs less subject to school district approval and influence.

REFERENCES:

Jackie Kimbrough, Stephen Crocker, and others. An Evaluation of the Emergency School Aid Act Nonprofit Organizations Program, 4 volumes. Santa Monica, CA: The Rand Corporation, 1978. Volume IV summarizes the conclusions and policy recommendations.

Robert T. Stout. Facilitating Desegregation: A Handbook for Community Organizations. Tempe, Arizona: Arizona State University, 1978. This a non-technical handbook intended for citizen groups.